# A Study of the Doctor-patient Relationship in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender Is the Night*: A Psychological Approach

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## Introduction

*Tender Is the Night*, which F. Scott Fitzgerald believed to be a self-confident work, took the author many years to finish writing. In fact, "Fitzgerald had worked on it off and on for almost nine years before it was published" (Stern 14). In spite of Fitzgerald's protracted, strenuous efforts, the novel met with a chilly reception among audiences. Clancy Martin explains part of the reaction to the novel, saying, "Always the faithful friend, Hemingway criticized *Tender Is the Night* (1934) for its lack of artistic imagination: He accused Fitzgerald of drawing too heavily on his own life" (Martin npg). That criticism of Fitzgerald's verisimilitude, Martin argues, had a valid basis: "Though this charge is unkind and aesthetically irrelevant, it's also true: Like F. Scott, Dick Diver is a romantic; Dick, like his creator, becomes a self-destructive drunk" (npg). In hopes of reversing this negative reputation, Fitzgerald attempted to rewrite *Tender Is the Night* by reorganizing the narrative chronologically; however, the author died of a heart attack before completing his revisions. Malcolm Cowley proceeded to finish the final revised version using Fitzgerald's notes. Therefore, it took 17 years after the first publication until the "the posthumous publication of the final revised version Fitzgerald had longed for" finally arrived (Stern 14). As Fahimeh Keshmiri and Mina Mahdikhani state, "The magnificence of *Tender Is the Night* and the rich content of its true entity were not recognized until the close of the twentieth century"; interpretations of the novel have not been positive until recently because the unfair initial evaluation of the novel persisted for many years (347).

One of the reasons for the slanted criticism of the novel is the difficulty in understanding Dick Diver's degradation. Dick appears as a young, promising

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psychiatrist in the opening scene of the novel. Given his seemingly bright future prospects, his actions in the latter half of the work are hard for readers to comprehend. He regularly creates problems in his personal relationships, for example. Dick quarrels with Mary North, who is "married to a Buddha" and has the papal title of the "Contessa di Minghetti," about his son Lanier's insistence that "the water was dirty" because he ignores what she says (261) and fights over a taxi fare, which results in violence. He is also an alcoholic and even examines a patient while smelling of alcohol. The patient's father, noticing the stench, rebukes Dick. Moreover, he has a love affair with Rosemary Hoyt and eventually divorces his wife. His numerous downfalls are generally inconceivable in light of his glorious past.

Dick's decline, which seems to defy comprehension, becomes the main theme of the novel. As Tiffany Joseph notes, "The main protagonist is the aptly and unfortunately named Dick Diver and, primarily, the novel is about Dick's decline" (67); the theme of the novel thus centers on Dick's ruin. Milton R. Stern also sheds light on the reason why Fitzgerald chose Dick's decline as his theme. According to Stern, "In all 18 drafts of the novel and in his letters, it is clear that Fitzgerald is concerned with the dying fall, the long dive that becomes both the theme and the narrative method of the story" (Stern 31). He also asserts that "The dying fall makes *Tender Is the Night* a series of goodbyes to lost hopes. The novel is saturated with events and signs of departure and the end of things" (Stern 33). As Stern suggests, the protagonist's decline, which is hard for readers to understand, seems to be a product of Fitzgerald's own concern.

Several critics have recognized and commented on the psychological aspect of the novel. First of all, key characters in the work have connections to psychiatry. Fitzgerald portrayed psychiatrist Dick Diver as a protagonist of the novel, for example, and his patient Nicole Warren — later his wife — has a mental disorder.

Second, it is worthwhile to note that Fitzgerald chose a mental hospital in Zurich for the setting of the novel's first scene. Keshmiri and Mahdikhani see that setting in the psychological context. "Plainly by starting with Diver as a young doctor in Zurich," the authors argue, "Fitzgerald declared that the novel is psychological story about Dick Diver, and that its social meaning is

gained by addition or synecdoche" (347).

Third, it also warrants mention that even the central plot elements of *Tender Is the Night* have a psychological dimension. Susann Cokal argues that incest, a main incident of the novel, has roots in Freudian doctrines. According to Cokal, "*Tender Is the Night* stretches over a classic Freudian framework of cause, effect, and blame centered on the incest issue" (Cokal 76).

Fourth, one of the keys to understanding *Tender Is the Night* is a knowledge of psychiatrist Sigmund Freud's significant influence on F. Scott Fitzgerald himself. Pointing out the major impact that Freud had on *Tender Is the Night*, Cokal highlights Freudian doctrines in the novel: "To Fitzgerald, Freud provides a plot template that explains character motivation and, on an even deeper level, creates a thematic architecture of loss and destruction that holds up the novel as a whole" (76). As Cokal suggests, the fact that Fitzgerald adopted Freudian ideas in the novel is worthy of note.

The purpose of this paper is to clarify Nicole's mental condition and the limits of her recovery from a psychological perspective, which will help make her disease and mental condition clearer. Although it is often said that Nicole's married life does not work out because her husband forms a substitute for her father, the paper uses the psychological angle to confirm the limits of her recovery and married life. The paper will also deal with the positives and negatives of the doctor-patient relationship — a vital piece of Nicole's recovery and the exacerbation of her condition. By considering the doctor-patient relationship, my discussion will also explain the reason for Dick's somewhat-confounding degeneration logically. Furthermore, the paper will focus on the fact that *Tender Is the Night* often introduces the theme of immorality: Most of the principal characters in the novel commit immoral acts or have inappropriate relationships. In addition to the problem of the doctor-patient relationship, Dick's degeneration also arises from his adultery. Not knowing his position as a doctor and husband, Dick commits two blunders. One is an unsuitable marriage between a doctor and a patient, and the other is his adulterous relationship with Rosemary. He seems to be very interested in Nicole and Rosemary. For example, he often exhibits thoughtless speech and behavior. He marries Nicole against the opposition of other psychiatrists.

Through this psychological approach, one can read Dick and Nicole's mar-

riage as an unsuitable arrangement and, furthermore, the collapse of their marriage as a reasonable development.

## I. The Positive Doctor-patient Relationship in Nicole's Recovery

As I stated above, some characters in *Tender Is the Night* have connections to psychiatry. Protagonist Dick Diver works at the mental hospital in Zurich as a doctor. Nicole Warren, meanwhile, is brought to the hospital by her father for the treatment of a psychiatric disorder. To begin with, the two meet under doctor–patient circumstances.

The doctor-patient relationship in *Tender Is the Night* has both positive and negative effects on patient recovery. This section deals with the positive aspects of the relationship.

Nicole Warren, Dick's patient, suffers from schizophrenia resulting from incest with her father. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) offers insight into her mental condition. According to the APA, "Schizophrenia is a disorder that lasts for at least 6 months and includes at least 1 month of active-phase symptoms (i.e., two [or more] of the following: delusions, hallucinations, disorganized speech, grossly disorganized or catatonic behavior, negative symptoms)" (298). In line with the APA's definition, Nicole's mental illness lasts for a long time. As noted in Section II, she also demonstrates delusional symptoms.

Psychologist John H. Harvey examines trauma sufferers. He explains the depth of the wound in an incest victim's heart, stating that "There can be no greater stigma associated with the loss of trust in close relationships and the sense of a violated self than that experienced by incest survivors" (Harvey 186). The fact that she cannot mention the matter means that she suffers serious psychological damage. The dialogue between Franz Gregorovius and Dick in *Tender Is the Night* ("'Did she ever go into the — horror directly?' 'No . . . '") (131) suggests her inability to confront or cope with her psychic trauma. Harvey also asserts that empathy by people in the victim's life leads to the victim's recovery:

> What came through in a profound way in the Harvey et al. (1991) incest study was the importance of caring empathy on the part of persons in whom a survivor attempts to confide. When the confiding attempt oc-

> curred relatively soon after the event and when it was met with empathy, the survivor was able to begin the healing process and usually suffered far less psychologically in subsequent years. When there was little empathy, the burden of the secret and associated stigma could not be confronted and, hence, continued to take its toll on the survivor. (188)

In Nicole's case, it seems that she cannot gain the sympathy of the people around her. Devereux Warren, the very person who commits the incest, tries to erase the fact; he does not want to confess his sin as the factor behind Nicole's illness. In addition, Warren worries about rumors, as is evident in Franz's remark that "After Warren's first collapse, he seemed chiefly concerned as to whether the story would ever leak back to America" (130). Warren wants to hide his immoral relationship with Nicole. Nicole's sister, Baby Warren, seems to believe what her father says and does not know the truth. She says to Dick, ". . . but I'm in the air. We've never had anything like this in the family before — we know Nicole had some shock and my opinion is it was about a boy, but we don't really know. Father says he would have shot him if he could have found out" (152). Franz also relates to Dick, "For a while she didn't have anybody — only one sister that she doesn't seem very close to" (130).

One of the positive aspects of the doctor-patient relationship manifest in *Tender Is the Night* is trust. Rapport, a "sympathetic or harmonious relationship or state of mutual understanding" (Colman 615), shows in the relationship between Dick and Nicole. As the *Dictionary of Psychology* explains, "Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) eventually widened its [rapport's] meaning and described it as the prototype (2) of the transference" (Colman 615); in fact, Nicole's psychiatrists note her transference. She has affection for her doctor, Dick Diver, and begins to fall in love with him. She finally finds the person whom she can rely on and open her heart to. In the following letter from Nicole, it seems that she has no one to depend upon except him:

> DEAR CAPTAIN DIVER:
>
> I write to you because there is no one else to whom I can turn and it seems to me if this farcicle situation is apparent to one as sick as me it should be apparent to you. The mental trouble is all over and besides that I am completely broken and humiliated, if that was what they wanted. My family have shamefully neglected me, there's no use asking them for

help or pity . . . (123)

This sense of transference, "the redirection of emotions and attitudes from their original instinctual object on to a substitute" (Colman 752), has a positive effect on her recovery in the initial treatment. In Franz's words, "It was the best thing that could have happened to her," . . . "a transference of the most fortuitous kind" (120). Nicole often sends Dick letters, and he kindly replies to each correspondence; Franz even says to Dick, "It was generous of you to answer them" (130). As Franz says, "Reading her letters helped us here — they were a measure of her condition"; the content of her letters illuminates her condition (130). One passage provides evidence of her recovery: "The letters were divided into two classes, of which the first class, up to about the time of the armistice, was of marked pathological turn, and of which the second class, running from thence up to the present, was entirely normal, and displayed a richly maturing nature" (121). Although her letters during the early stage show hints of morbidity, it is clear that her mental condition is improving rapidly. Nicole herself also admits, "When I was ill I didn't mind sitting inside with the others in the evening — what they said seemed like everything else. Naturally now I see them as ill and it's — it's —" (141). Nicole's sister Baby says to Dick, "Nicole told me that you look part care of her, and had a lot to do with her getting well" (151). When Nicole falls in love with her doctor, Dick, Franz initially sees the turn of events in a positive light, saying, "That was enough — it gave her somebody to think of outside" (130). Professor Dohmler also recognizes her efforts for recovery: "Miss Nicole does well indeed" (139). Nicole recovers her vitality so rapidly that "Dick became less and less certain of his relation to her, her confidence increased" (135). As the following quotation suggests, she takes some positive action to attract his attention. She pretends to be interested in him, quoting the following phrase:

Our cook at home taught it to me:
"A woman never knows
What a good man she's got
Till after she turns him down . . ."
"You like it?"
She smiled at him, making sure that the smile gathered up everything inside her and directed it toward him . . . (136)

When Nicole talks to Dick about her hobbies, like linguistic abilities, music, and drawing, Dick feels "It made him sad when she brought out her accomplishments for his approval" (142).

From a psychological viewpoint, Nicole's rapport with and transference toward Dick make her recovery possible at the beginning of her treatment. Nicole, who cannot receive support from her family, trusts her doctor Dick and opens her heart to him. Meanwhile, Dick works hard to answer all the letters from her. One could thus argue that their ideal doctor-patient relationship has a positive effect on Nicole's treatment.

## II. The Limits of Nicole's Recovery and the Negative Doctor-patient Relationship

Nicole's warm feelings toward Dick gradually begin to go too far, leading her to make physical contact with him of her own free will. As Fitzgerald writes, "She stood up too, and stumbling over the phonograph, was momentarily against him, leaning into the hollow of his rounded shoulder" (136). She confesses her love for him, saying, "If I hadn't been sick would you — I mean, would I have been the sort of girl you might have — oh, slush, you know what I mean" (154). "Give me a chance now," she says, and kisses him on the lips passionately (154).

Nicole's love for Dick makes her recovery possible at the outset but gradually becomes an issue in the clinical setting. Franz warns Dick, "We think it's best to have a program. Four weeks have passed away — apparently the girl is in love with you. That's not our business if we were in the world, but here in the clinic we have a stake in the matter" (138). Professor Dohmler echoes that sentiment, remarking, "But I have much to do with the fact that this so-called 'transference' . . . must be terminated. Miss Nicole does well indeed, but she is in no condition to survive what she might interpret as a tragedy" (139). He also emphasizes Dick's position as a doctor: "But it is a professional situation" (140). From Dohmler's candid advice, readers can comprehend how the love relationship between Dick and Nicole is inappropriate within the context of the doctor-patient relationship.

However, Dick makes up his mind to marry Nicole, going against Dohmler and Franz's views. "I'm half in love with her — the question of marrying her

has passed through my mind" (140), Dick confesses, to which Franz lodges his forceful opposition: "What! And devote half your life to being doctor and nurse and all — never! I know what these cases are. One time in twenty it's finished in the first push — better never see her again!" (140). However, even Dick thinks their marriage is strange. In fact, he asks himself, "For Doctor Diver to marry a mental patient? How did it happen? Where did it begin?" (156). In the end, their married life culminates in divorce.

Although psychiatrist Dick Diver and his patient Nicole Warren fall in love and marry, their unsuitable marriage has a harmful effect on both of them. Rosemary eventually sees their marriage as a "cooled relation" and thinks, "When people have so much for outsiders didn't it indicate a lack of inner intensity?" (75). Franz's remarks on Nicole's state, suggesting that "the percentage of cures, even so-called social cures, is very low at that age," show that Nicole's recovery is difficult to begin with (130). The APA also affirms that stance: "Complete remission (i.e., a return to full premorbid functioning) is probably not common in this disorder [Schizophrenia]" (309). To Franz, Nicole has little hope of a thorough recovery; "I know what these cases are," he says. "One time in twenty it's finished in the first push" (140). In fact, Nicole's unstable psychological condition makes their marriage life difficult:

> . . . After all these years, should recognize symptoms of strain in herself and guard against them. Twice within a fortnight she had broken up: there had been the night of the dinner at Tarnes . . . The collapse in Paris was another matter, adding significance to the first one. It prophesied possibly a new cycle, a new pousse of the malady. (168)

Dick decides on a therapeutic approach in light of Nicole's serious condition:

> A "schizophrêne" is well named as a split personality — Nicole was alternately a person to whom nothing need be explained and one to whom nothing *could* be explained. It was necessary to treat her with active and affirmative insistence, keeping the road to reality always open, making the road to escape harder going. But the brilliance, the versatility of madness is akin to the resourcefulness of water seeping through, over and around a dike. It requires the united front of many people to work against it. He felt it necessary that this time Nicole cure herself; he wanted to wait until she remembered the other times, and revolted from

them. (191–92).

Nicole suffers a complete relapse after her second child Topsy's birth. She traces her past, saying, "after my second child, my little girl, Topsy, was born everything got dark again" (161). Jon G. Allen provides insight from the psychological angle:

> Westerlund discovered several common problem areas associated with a history of incest: negative body perceptions (seeing the body as dirty, bad, out of control; feeling betrayed by the body's arousal), problems with reproduction (apprehension about becoming a parent, reawakening of incest memories and experiences associated with giving birth and nursing); and guilt feelings about sexual fantasy (especially fantasy involving violence, force, humiliation, or pain, as well as fantasy involving the offender). (224)

In Nicole's case, childbirth and childcare make her mental disorder worse, as evidenced by "her long relapse following Topsy's birth" (168). Nicole's description of how "bringing up children she could only pretend gently to love, guided orphans" underlines her struggle to be a parent (180).

When she encounters a difficulty that she cannot endure, Nicole has an attack of hysterics: She goes mad in the bathroom at the discovery of Jules Peterson's remains. Peterson is "a legal witness to the early morning dispute in Montparnasse," and "the Negroes" are out to kill him for his betrayal (106). She receives a letter from Dick's former patient, who wants to know about Dick's inappropriate relationship with the patient's daughter. After that, her madness even causes a traffic accident, with "the mad hand clutching the steering wheel" (192). As the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* explains about schizophrenia, "The positive symptoms (Criteria A1-A4) include distortions in thought content (delusions), perception (hallucinations), language and thought process (disorganized speech), and self-monitoring of behavior (grossly disorganized or catatonic behavior" (APA 299).

According to the APA:

> Delusions (Criterion A1) are erroneous beliefs that usually involve a misinterpretation of perceptions or experiences. Their content may include a variety of themes (e.g., persecutory, referential, somatic, religious,

> or grandiose). Persecutory delusions are most common; the person believes he or she is being tormented, followed, tricked, spied on, or ridiculed. (299)

Nicole's delusion is apparent in a scene in the novel:

> "That's just preposterous — let me loose — that's an insult to my intelligence. Don't you think I saw that girl look at you — that little dark girl. Oh, this is farcical — a child, not more than fifteen. Don't you think I saw?"
> "Stop here a minute and quiet down."
> The sat at a table, her eyes in a profundity of suspicion, her hand moving across her line of sight as if it were obstructed . . .
> "We won't go into that. Listen to me — this business about a girl is a delusion, do you understand that word?"
> "It's always a delusion when I see what you don't want me to see" (189–90).

Dick has a hard time dealing with Nicole from the position of a doctor or a husband:

> Having gone through unprofessional agonies during her long relapse following Topsy's birth, he had, perforce, hardened himself about her, making a cleavage between Nicole sick and Nicole well. This made it difficult now to distinguish between his self-protective professional detachment and some new coldness in his heart. As an indifference cherished, or left to atrophy, becomes an emptiness, to this extent he had learned to become empty of Nicole, serving her against his will with negations and emotional neglect. (168)

Thus, it is clear that Nicole becomes a psychological burden for Dick, who gradually loses his equilibrium.

As mentioned above, Nicole's excessive love for Dick becomes an issue at the clinic. Rebuffing other psychiatrists' opinions, Dick marries Nicole. From a psychological perspective, a complete remission from schizophrenia is extremely difficult for Nicole to achieve. In the end, the marriage between Dick and Nicole breaks down due to Nicole's repeated hysterics. Dick himself becomes exhausted in his efforts to cope.

### III. Repeated Immorality and Dick's Degradation

One of the features of *Tender Is the Night* is its characters' repeated immorality. The incest between Devereux Warren and his daughter Nicole, the sexual relationship between Dick and his patient Nicole, and the adultery between Dick and Rosemary are several examples. What is more, Nicole herself commits adultery with Tommy Barban. Dick and Nicole's unstable life begins to collapse with the appearance of Rosemary, a young beautiful actress, and her access to Dick. Later, at the time of their divorce, Nicole expresses the development succinctly: "Things were never the same after Rosemary" (308).

Immoral actions appear numerous times throughout the novel. While the characters conceal their misdeeds at first, the eventual revelations generate confusion. Rich in the atmosphere of concealment, Fitzgerald's writing succeeds in fostering a mood of deceit and secrecy.

In the novel, characters who sin tend to experience exclusion or interpersonal disintegration. Warren, the incestuous father, is barred from seeing his daughter by the psychiatrists. Franz explains to Dick, "Dohmler told Warren we would take the case if he would agree to keep away from his daughter indefinitely, with an absolute minimum of five years" (130). During the interview with Warren, Professor Dohmler notices "the falsity that pervaded the whole room" and uncovers the incest that Warren hides (128). Later, Warren finds himself dying due to alcohol poisoning at the age of fifty. Moreover, Dick's affair with Rosemary breaks up. His marriage with Nicole, which the other psychiatrists object to, ends in divorce. While Nicole finds Tommy as a new partner and remarries, Dick practices medicine in Geneva, New York, without seeing his children.

Stern makes it clear why Fitzgerald chose protagonist Dick Diver's downfall as the theme of this novel, seeing the reason behind Dick's tragic ending as follows:

> Fitzgerald had always planned his narrative as a dying fall. He came to feel that the merger of structure and narrative method with the enormous sense of loss he wished to dramatize demanded a straight, chronological line of Dick's dying fall, beginning at the heights and merging into events in which the diver is seen progressively sapped, losing his powers and charm, and sinking finally from sight. (Stern 32)

Martin attributes Dick's degeneration to money. "Before meeting the flamboyantly wealthy Nicole, Dick is a brilliant, young, broke soon-to-be psychiatrist on the rise," Martin writes. "What undoes him is not a moral failing, but a material one-Nicole's money overmasters him, because he does not come from money" (Martin npg). From a psychological viewpoint, however, Dick's act goes against his morals as a doctor. Keshmiri and Mahdikhani point out Dick's mistake, stating that "His foolishness was falling in love with Nicole in the first place" (349). In the same way, Ann Siow Chong analyzes his behavior as a doctor in light of the modern-day situation. According to her, "Had it been set in the present time, things might have turned out differently for Diver as he would have been in breach of professional conduct by marrying someone who was his patient and hence risked being sanctioned and possibly disbarred from practising as a psychiatrist" (Chong npg). She also quotes the opinion of the APA: "The present position of the American Psychiatric Association is unequivocally clear: Sexual relationships with current or former patients are simply unethical and forbidden" (Chong npg). In the novel itself, as well, Professor Dohmler opposes the romantic relationship between Dick and Nicole, saying, "But it is a professional situation" (140). Joseph also adds commentary on the theme. "Through Dick's embodiment of the paternal/protective father/lover position," Joseph posits, "Dick and Nicole reenact the incestuous relationship that instigated Nicole's illness" (67). Nicole suffers again by having a sexual relationship with a man who plays a paternal role. In an ironic twist, then, their love and marriage actually make Nicole's condition worse.

Dick's portrayal in Book 1 is that of a charming man. "Save among a few of the tough-minded and perennially suspicious, he had the power of arousing a fascinated and uncritical love" (27), Fitzgerald writes, and "there was a pleasingness about him that simply had to be used" (87). These qualities give him an allure that fascinates Rosemary.

Nicole says to Dick, "Some of the time I think it's my fault — I've ruined you . . . But you used to want to create things — now you seem to want to smash them up" (267). Meanwhile, he tells her, "You ruined me, did you? . . . Then we're both ruined. So —" (273). As they sign their names "Dicole" in their first days in love, "Dick and Nicole had become one and equal,

not oppose and complementary; she was Dick too, the drought in the marrow of his bones. He could not watch her disintegrations without participating in them" (190–91).

Dick's love for Rosemary ends up by the existence of Nicotera. He says to Rosemary, "I guess I'm the Black Death . . . I don't seem to bring people happiness any more" (219).

Fitzgerald brings immorality into *Tender Is the Night* time and time again. Considering the ruin that the actions bring to relationships, the participants in the immorality sustain damage. In a psychological context, the marriage between Dick and Nicole — a contravention of the standard doctor-patient relationship — is inappropriate. Dick's downfall begins after he breaks the relationship. Furthermore, Nicole's condition becomes worse by having a sexual relationship with a man in a type of paternal position.

## Conclusion

In spite of F. Scott Fitzgerald's protracted efforts to write *Tender Is the Night*, the initial incarnation of the novel met with stiff criticism that led the author to rewrite the novel chronologically. One of the causes of the work's ill reputation was the difficulty that readers had in understanding protagonist Dick Diver's downfall. Using a psychological approach, however, makes it possible to explain his downfall and the difficulty of Nicole's recovery in a convincing way. From that point of view, their marriage is inappropriate under the conventions of the doctor-patient relationship. That doctor-patient relationship has an enormous impact, both good and bad, on Nicole's mental condition: It makes Nicole's recovery possible in the initial stages of her treatment, but actions in violation of the relationship trigger a relapse. In addition, many characters in the novel behave immorally and see their inappropriate relationships collapse in the end.

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